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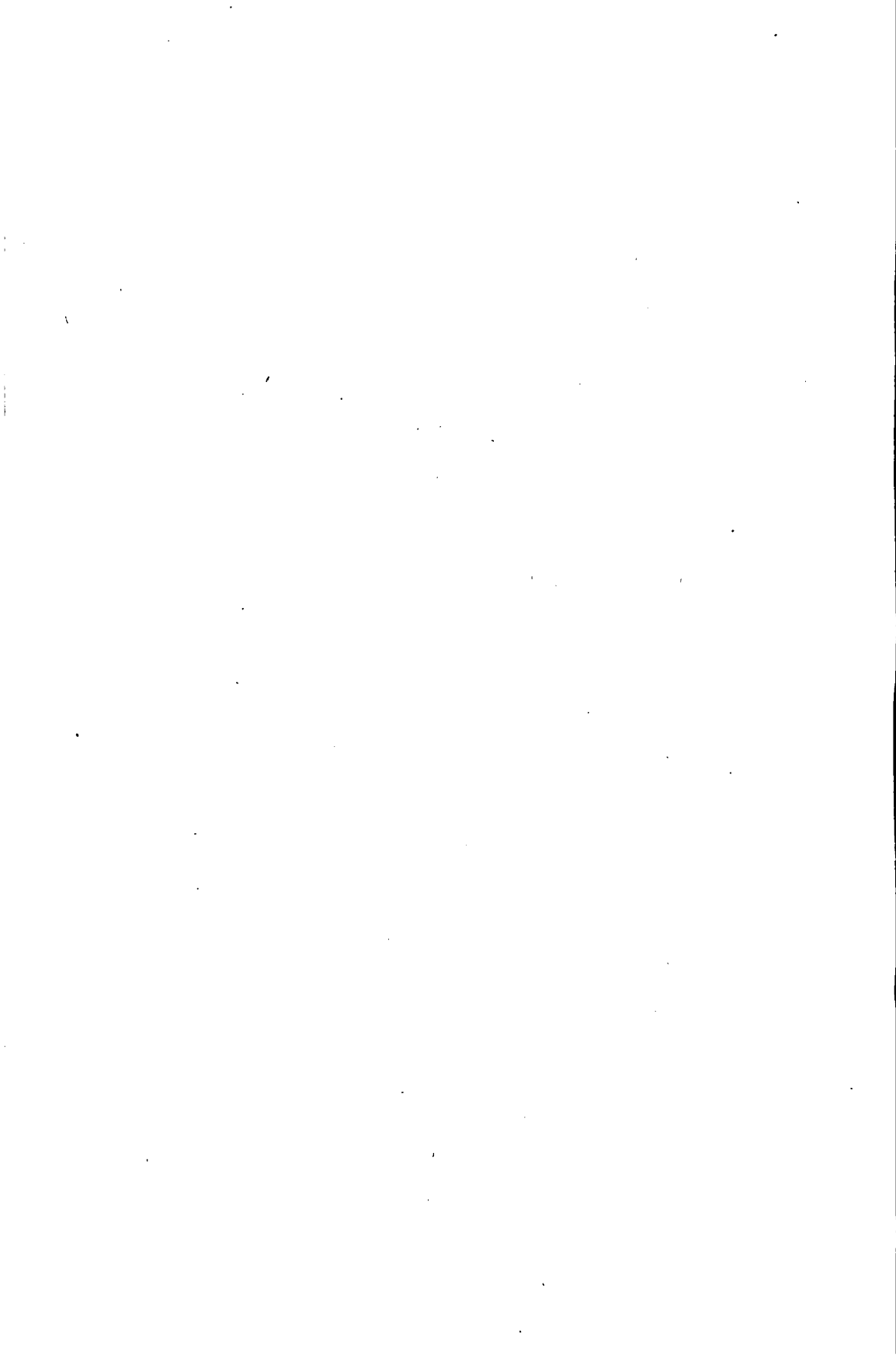


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Improvement of  
the City of Detroit

Report made by Professors  
Frederick Law Olmsted, Junr.  
and Mr. Charles Milton Robinson  
to the Detroit Board of Commerce

Detroit Board of Commerce  
1875









**Improvement of  
the City of Detroit**

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Frederick Law Olmsted, Junior,  
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**Detroit Board of Commerce  
1905**

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## Introduction

*Gentlemen:* The Committee on Civic Improvement respectfully report as follows:

Before the Committee was organized, the Board of Commerce had secured a report on the improvement of the City of Detroit from Mr. Charles Mulford Robinson, who is well known in connection with the propaganda for civic improvement, and whose writings on that subject have wide circulation.

At the request of your Committee, the Directors invited Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., professor of Landscape Architecture at Harvard University, to spend a week in Detroit, and make a report on the various improvement topics under discussion. Professor Olmsted was one of the Washington Park Commission, and by President Roosevelt has been retained in an advisory capacity in connection with that work, besides having charge of the landscape features of the Capitol grounds and the National Zoological Park. His firm are also the consulting landscape architects of the Metropolitan Park System of Boston, of the Chicago outer park system, and of the most important park work in this country. The elder Olmsted made the original plans for Belle Isle Park, and many of his suggestions are still available among his papers. Subsequent to his visit to Detroit, Professor Olmsted was called upon to make a report on the improvement of the Huron River, with special reference to the cities of Ypsilanti and Ann

Arbor, and there is good reason to believe that all of his work in this portion of the country will produce tangible results.

Both Professor Olmsted's and Mr. Robinson's reports are submitted herewith, with the recommendation that they be printed for the use of the members of the Board of Commerce.

The Committee has held a number of meetings. From the beginning it took strong ground against the location of the new Belle Isle Casino on the site of the present structure. The Commissioner of Parks and Boulevards, who is a valuable member of the Committee, was heartily in accord with his fellow members, and he afforded the Committee every opportunity for a thorough study of the entire subject of the casino. The Secretary of the Park Commission, (Mr. Hurlbut,) also gave advice of great benefit. The Municipal Art Commission, rescinding their previous action, came to the support of the position of your Committee; and as a result there is now a unanimous choice of a site in substantial accord with the views expressed by Professor Olmsted in his report.

The Committee also has had a number of conferences with the architect selected to prepare plans for the casino, (Mr. Schilling,) and they have reached an agreement as to the character of the architecture, and the general objects to be sought in such a structure.

On the subject of the improvement of the River Front, the Committee have conferred with Mayor Codd, who has promised that the City Engineer shall make soundings and prepare estimates of cost in accordance with the simplest of the three designs submitted by Professor Olmsted. Until these plans and estimates are prepared, the Committee's work in this direction is at a standstill.

The Committee, at the request of the Michigan State Agricultural Society, took an interest in the plan of the grounds for the State Fair grounds, the location and character of the buildings, and the financial arrangements for the erection of the structures built this year. While the

time within which the work must be completed was short, the general scheme of the grounds as planned was adhered to; and the improvements to be made during the coming year should show results by the time for the next fair. The buildings constructed are simple in design and permanent in character; and each is located in accordance with the general plan.

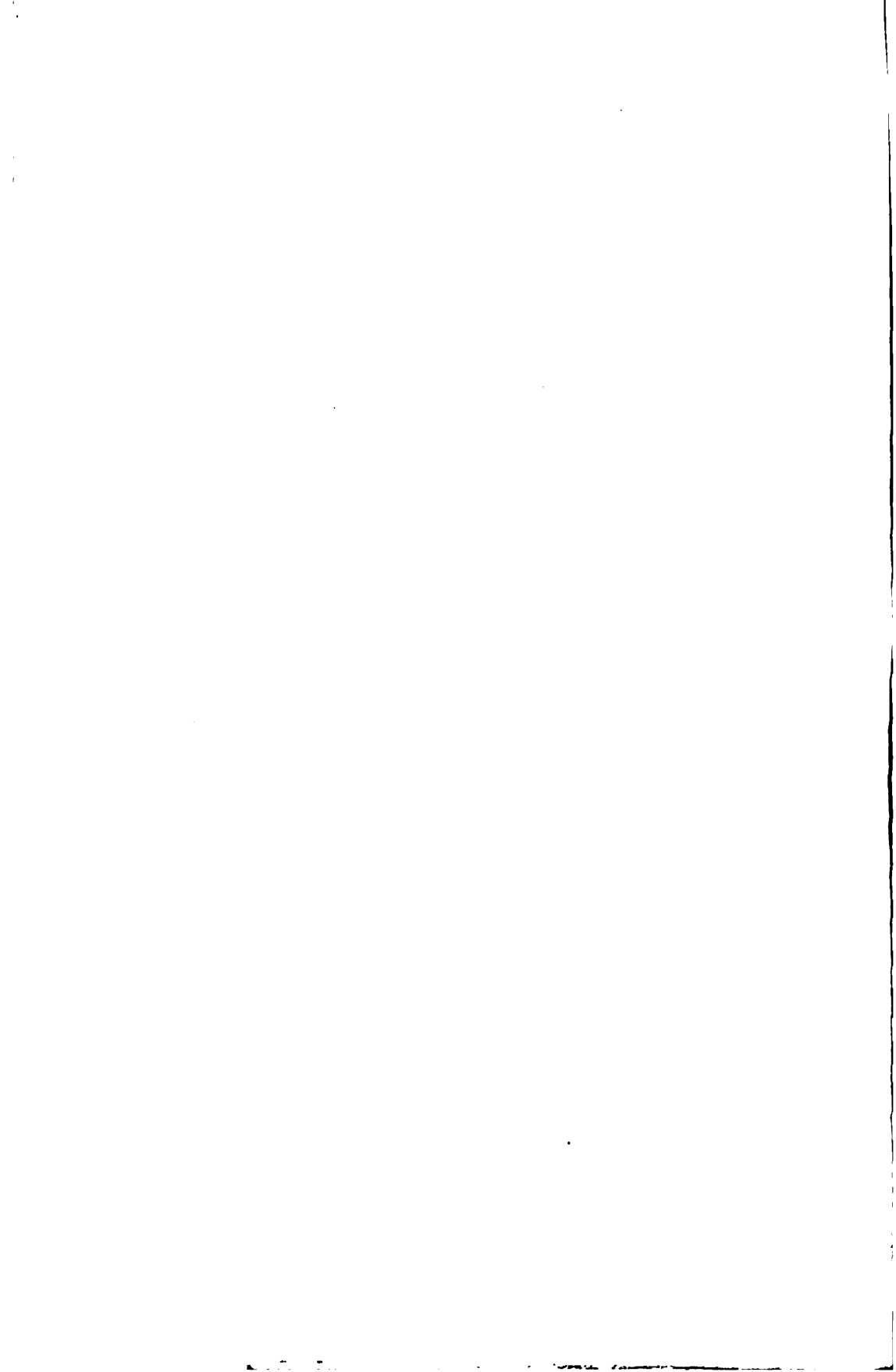
In submitting this report of progress, your Committee desires to express the hope that the suggestions presented by Professor Olmsted and Mr. Robinson will be read and carefully considered by the members of the Board of Commerce, so that each member may be acquainted both with the nature of the problems with which the Committee is called upon to deal, and also with the solutions that have been proposed.

Very respectfully,

Charles Moore,

Chairman.

To the Board of Directors of  
the Detroit Board of Commerce



## Improvement of the City of Detroit

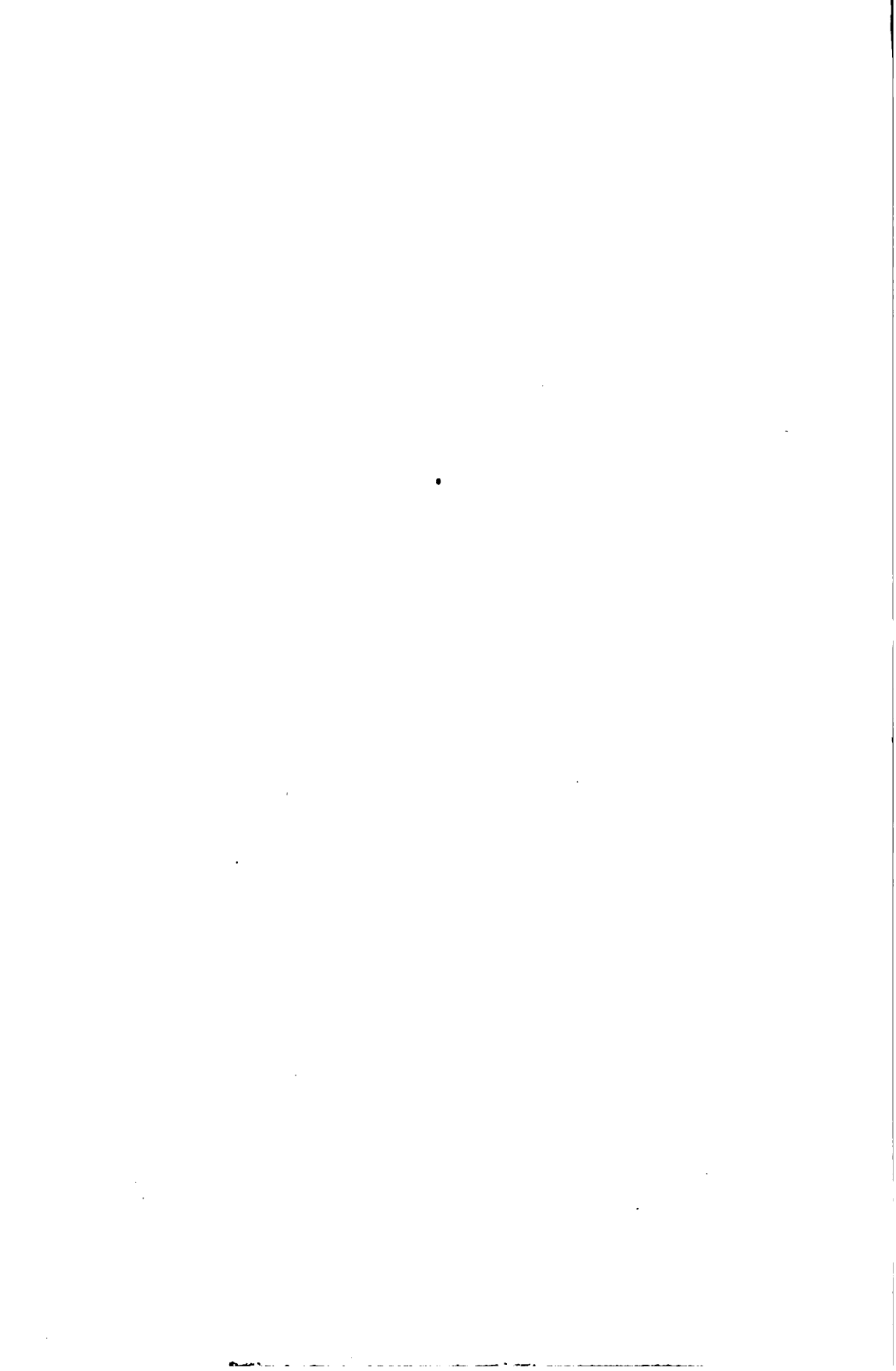
Report of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.

GENTLEMEN:—Having spent a week in Detroit at the request of the Detroit Board of Commerce Committee on the Improvement of the City of Detroit, examining certain municipal problems to which the Committee directed my attention, I beg to submit the following report:

I understand that an opinion is desired from me as to what action may best be urged upon the City by the Board of Commerce in respect to the following matters:

1. The Improvement of the River Margin.
2. The further Improvement of Belle Isle, with particular regard to the need for a new and better Casino Building.
3. The Completion and Improvement of the Boulevard.
4. The Improvement of the heart of the City—Cadillac Square and its vicinity.





## I.

### Improvement of the River Margin

#### A. The Central Section—the Front

The river margin of Detroit is divided by conditions of use and location into several distinct sections, one of the most important of which is the central one lying between the railroad frontages which border the river east of Brush Street and west of Third Street. This section, pre-eminently **THE FRONT OF THE CITY** on the river, is mainly appropriated, not only by present use but by the logic of its situation, to passenger and local freight business. On account of its central location, opposite the heart of the city where all the main streets and car lines converge, where the financial and office district is permanently centered, and whence the principal retail districts are bound to radiate, no matter in which direction they chiefly grow, this half mile has permanent exclusive advantages for transshipping all the steamboat passengers between Detroit and every point on the vast river and lake system which Detroit commands. The freight of such a locality, though large and certain to grow, is not likely, if we may judge by the experience of seaboard cities, to include a great volume of heavy staples or manufacturing freight, but rather a miscellaneous class of individually small shipments for local distribution.

As the city's inevitable and rapid growth continues, and as time and enterprise develop the enormous possibilities of the summer resort business of the Great Lakes, it will become necessary to carry on upon this limited frontage a volume of business in comparison with which

the present lively traffic is a mere trifle. Through the casual, haphazard development of the front by private initiative, facilities have been provided which meet present traffic requirements tolerably well, but in the future it will be necessary to utilize every foot of this space to its maximum capacity, a condition which cannot be met except by intelligent co-operation between all the interested parties. These parties obviously are the steamboat concerns; the merchants and manufacturers who ship and receive freight by the vessels; the passengers who come and go by ferry, excursion and long-distance steamer; the transportation concerns which take care of the freight and passengers on the land side; and finally the city at large, which is dependent for its full prosperity upon the economy, speed, convenience and general satisfaction with which this business is handled.

On account of the vital interest of the city in providing for the upbuilding of this traffic along the most satisfactory lines, and because of certain important incidental benefits which the city might derive from the proper development of the water front, if in planning it account is taken of all public interests instead of only those which would bring direct profit to the transportation companies, it is highly desirable that the city should take the initiative in bringing the various interests into co-operation.

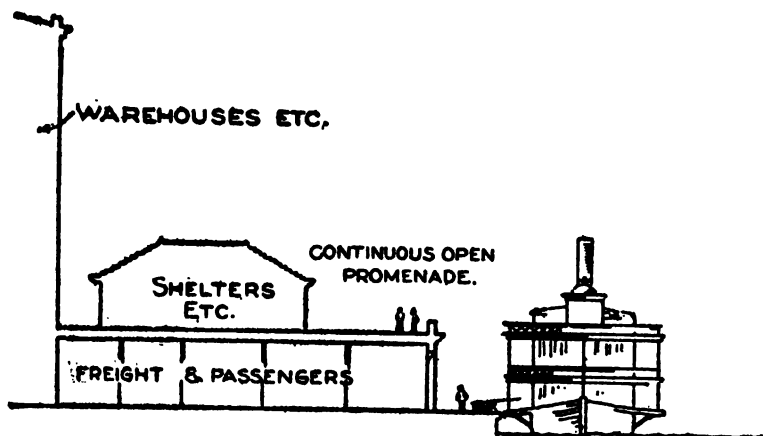
I would suggest that a strong commission be appointed to consult with all the interested parties and to learn by patient inquiry and study what their needs are likely to be—not only in the immediate future, with which alone the dividend-seeking companies are now concerned, but in the more distant future to which the city as a whole must look. Such a commission must have authority and means to employ surveyors to ascertain the facts as to existing structures, boundary lines, character of

foundations, etc.; conveyancers to ascertain the facts as to land ownerships, leases, and the often complicated entanglements of private, municipal, state and national rights and powers which occur upon such a littoral; and such other competent experts as may be needed to reach a thorough understanding of the problem. They would then be in a position to direct the preparation of plans and estimates of cost, to devise an equitable method of distributing that cost, and propose to the City Council and Legislature a suitable method of carrying out the plans and meeting such portion of the cost as may equitably fall upon the city.

The following project of a possible treatment of The River Front is put forward, not at all as a solution of the problem, because I have only the most superficial acquaintance with the facts, but as a suggestion of the sort of way in which the problem should be approached; namely, with a single eye to meeting in the best possible manner—that is to say, in the way most permanently profitable to the community—the requirements of the various parties which have an interest in the use of the River Front.

Experience everywhere seems to show that the best way of handling such freight is upon a broad, covered wharf or quay, connecting on the water side with the main deck of the steamers and on the land side with the level of the streets used for teaming.

If adequate space can be provided either by getting control of adjacent property on the land side or by building out into the stream, it is possible that it would be an advantage to introduce on the same level a set of tracks equipped with electric flat cars for local transfers of freight from point to point along the quay and between the vessels and the adjacent warehouses. If these tracks should extend to the railroad yards further along the river



### SECTION SHOWING TYPE OF CONSTRUCTION ADAPTED TO IMMEDIATE REQUIREMENTS OF RIVER FRONT No. 1

bank, these electric flat cars would also serve to transfer the ordinary railroad freight cars back and forth for handling material that might be coming or going by railroad, either between the railroad and the steamers or between the railroad and warehouses back of the quay. Such tracks at grade should not, of course, be used for transferring any considerable amount of through freight between the two railroads, and if that necessity should arise a separate provision ought to be made for it, but for local business the direct communication of such tracks at grade with quay and street and warehouse basement would seem highly valuable.

On the other hand, to mix up the passenger business, with all the hurly-burly of freight sheds, any more than can be avoided is extremely inconvenient and undesirable. Even the streets approaching the Front, passing through a wholesale warehouse district and crowded as they will be with heavy teams and rough teamsters, are sure to be an inconvenient and disagreeable means of approach for passengers, as such streets are in every city

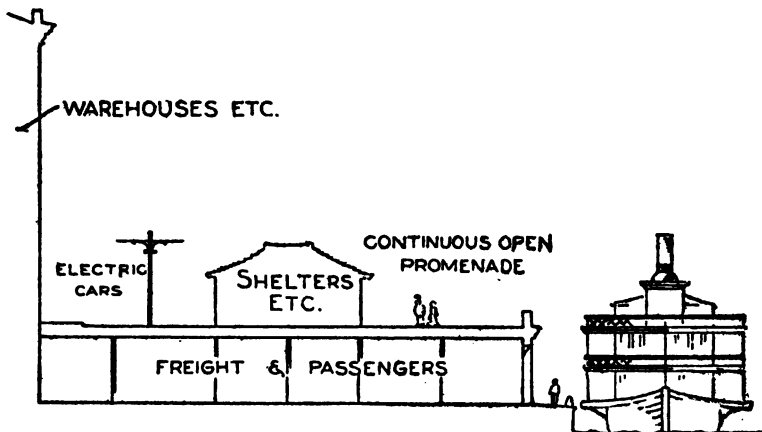
in the country. The device already employed by some of the steamboat companies of building pavilions for the use of passengers on the roofs of their freight sheds, is an admirable one, and it would seem as though it might be developed by giving means of approach for passengers at this level and providing as far as possible for the waiting rooms, ticket offices, etc., on this upper level, and for landing the passengers here from the upper deck in case of all steamers which can be adapted to the arrangement, so as to care for the passengers independently of the freight business.

Probably, for the immediate future at least, it may be best to confine all the steamboat business (passengers and freight alike) to the main wharf level, and simply provide a continuous open public promenade on the upper deck, which would be reached by steps from the various streets, would connect all the different boat lines in a convenient manner, and would afford at the same time a most valuable public recreation place. This appears to be the present opinion of those steamboat men with whom I have had the opportunity to talk.

Looking, however, to the more distant future, it seems to be worth considering whether provision should not be made at some time for bringing a loop line of electric cars along the front to receive and deliver passengers from all over the city directly at the landing place of every steamer, without having to walk even the three blocks from Jefferson Avenue through streets which are bound to be far more congested with heavy freight traffic in the future than they have been in the past. Such a line of tracks—at the level of the second deck, but far enough from the front of the quay to leave ample space for passenger waiting rooms, ticket offices, refreshment stands and perhaps a covered promenade—need not endanger or annoy the people using the Front in

the least, while the cars would make it far more accessible and popular than it would otherwise be.

That such an elevated track need not be a nuisance has been demonstrated in Berlin, where the new electric elevated railroad is so built and equipped, although reported to have cost much less per mile than similar roads in this country, that it is practically noiseless and the property along the line of it has actually appreciated in value following its construction, while the space under the tracks has become a popular sheltered promenade. If such tracks were provided for and kept under public control so as not to give exclusive use of them to the street car companies, it would be possible also to have them connect at each end with the steam railroad tracks and to have excursion trains hauled over them by electric locomotives directly to the steamboat landings.

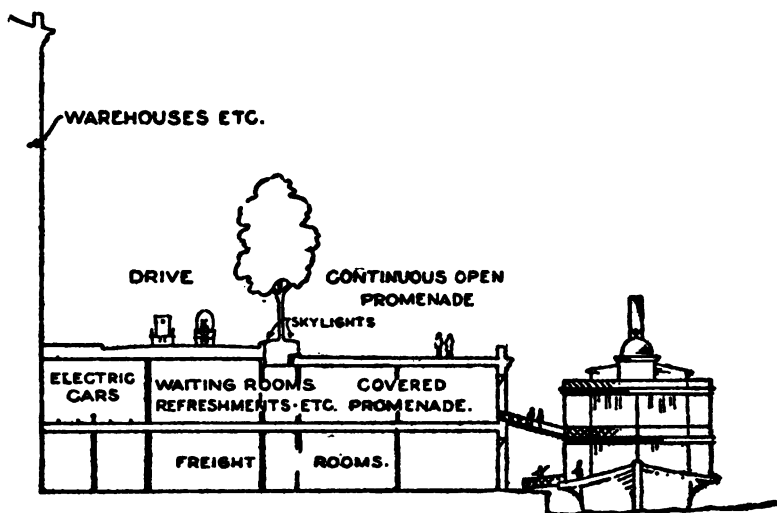


SECTION SHOWING POSSIBLE MODIFICATION  
OF NO.1. PROVIDING FOR LOOPLINE OF  
ELECTRIC CARS TO CONNECT WITH ALL  
STEAMBOAT LINES.  
No.2

In case such a project as the above should prove, upon careful examination, to be feasible—that is to say, if it should be found either now, or ten or twenty or fifty years from now, that the probable volume of business would be sufficient to justify the necessary expenditure for such a large piece of construction as I have outlined—such a project might be further supplemented by a continuous open promenade on the flat roof of this covered second story at a level high enough to command the river even over the decks of the steamers which will at times form a continuous obstruction to the view of the river from the lower levels. Again, looking to the distant future, the electric car tracks also might be covered over, if deemed advisable, so as to give an elevated driveway or street, free from any annoyance of car tracks, not itself interfering with the enjoyment of the foot passengers on the promenade at the edge of the river, but high enough to look over them to the view and affording a street frontage for the land back of the quay—land which is now and must otherwise remain only back land. Of course, in buildings to be erected on this land the street floor on the river front would correspond with the third floor on the side streets.

Such an elevated River Drive would be substantially on a level with Jefferson Avenue, and would connect with it by approaches at Woodward Avenue as well as at Brush and Third Streets. At Woodward Avenue the width of the street is so great that it would permit the construction of an inclined approach in the middle of the street without disturbing property at the sides at all, and the grades are such that the central inclined roadway, starting up from Woodbridge Street, would be high enough by the time it reached Atwater Street to allow the latter to pass under without interference. At Brush and Third Streets there would seem to be no difficulty





SECTION SHOWING POSSIBLE ULTIMATE  
DEVELOPMENT OF RIVER FRONT.  
No. 3

in securing adequate approaches to the raised drive and promenade.

Assuming such a structure to be built in the most economical manner consistent with durability and safety from fire, there is no reason why it should not still be admirably dignified in architectural character and form a really noble front to the city. Built of concrete, in the simplest and most straightforward manner, without the least elaboration of applied ornament or architectural gewgaws, all that is necessary to make it a noble work of civic art is good proportioning of its parts.

A very important phase of such an improvement would be its relation to adjacent property on the landward side. For warehouses and certain kinds of light manufacture, the central location with respect to the business district of the city, when supplemented by the direct connection of the basement story with the wharves and possibly with railroad sidings, should render these sites exceed-

ingly valuable if intelligently developed, and rentals of the right of opening upon the tracks and quay, and also of the right of opening upon the upper roadway, and under cover to the electric car stations, ought to be sufficient to pay the interest charges on a very considerable municipal investment. Moreover, the convenience of the location in respect to the passenger steamers and the railroads, and the great interest of the southern outlook over the water and the shipping, should make a location on the improved River Front an admirable one for a great hotel catering especially to the excursion and convention business, for which the natural advantages of Detroit have already given it such prominence despite the inadequate accommodations which have hitherto been afforded.

But for whatever purposes permanent buildings might be erected on The Front, there is no reason why they should not be of substantial and dignified construction; and if the city, having taken a hand in providing the facilities of The Front, were to give the use of them to abutting property only on condition that building plans be approved by the officers in charge of the improvement, it would be possible to secure a consistent character in the adjacent buildings which would make the whole composition one of the most dignified and striking city fronts in the world.

As I said before launching upon the above description, it is nothing more than a pleasant dream based upon an utterly superficial acquaintance with the situation, and the chances are that the project which I have thus outlined by way of example is quite different from the result which sober, patient study of the conditions would lead to; but I am absolutely confident that such intelligent, patient, comprehensive study of the water front problems will be able to evolve *some* method of treatment

which will, if adopted and consistently followed, bring to the community in the long run an enormously greater return from the asset which it possesses in its central river frontage than it is likely to get by letting matters drift along under the impulse of diverse private initiative, directed almost solely by a regard for immediate cash returns.

In the long successful future of Detroit the possible difference to the city between a wise and an unwise treatment of the Front will be measurable in millions of dollars, and the present investment of a few thousands in a sufficiently thorough study to set matters moving on the right path, is in the nature of an insurance premium at a rate so low that no business corporation would hesitate for an instant to pay it out. Are the people of Detroit so fixed in the short-sighted, hand-to-mouth methods of business, which frontier conditions once forced upon the whole American people, that they cannot learn the lesson which the Trusts are teaching on every hand—that great and continued success in any big enterprise comes from thorough and unstinted investigation, comprehensive plans, and then steady, unhurried, but firm and undeviating pursuit of the adopted plan or policy?

#### B. The Railroad Yards

For a distance of some half mile or more on either side of the River Front proper the shore is bordered by railroad yards, including the car-ferry slips and wharves, where a small amount of freight is transferred between rail and water. What the future of these sections is likely to be I have at present no means of judging, but I would point out that any planning for their best ultimate utilization is deeply involved with three

other important problems; namely, the location of the proposed tunnel under the river, the location and character of the future Union Station to which Detroit must look forward, and the decision as to whether to undertake the very costly elimination of the grade crossings all along the present railroad approach to the Grand Trunk Station from the north, or to abandon that station and its yards in favor of the proposed Union Station. These are large and complex questions about which the experts of the railroad corporations probably have a much better knowledge than anyone else, but the city is deeply concerned in having them solved in a comprehensive way and with due consideration for the interests of the community as a whole as well as for the interest of the railroad stockholders.

If a commission is appointed to study the water front problem, it would seem highly desirable to give it authority and means to study also these railroad problems and to consult with the railroad officials about their solution.

### C. The West Manufacturing Belt

Beginning at the end of the railroad yards not far from the West Boulevard and extending far beyond the present city limits, is the district which more than any other seems destined to hold the great industrial future of Detroit. The main railroad lines are far enough back from the river to allow ample space for the development of industrial plants of the largest size with docks and wharves of any desired length, yet the distance to the railroad is not so great or the space so much occupied as to interfere with the ready construction of numerous sidings; the river affords not only the opportunity of cheap water shipments but an unfailing cheap supply of

water for manufacturing purposes. It is to be confidently expected that the greater part of this region will be occupied by factories among a network of freight tracks and with a great series of wharves and docks extending for miles along the river. Private enterprise, following the lines of least resistance, is shaping this region to the purposes which it is best fitted to serve.

But there are certain problems which must be dealt with here by common action, and the earlier they are studied the more successfully and economically can they be met. The success of the factories will be largely dependent upon the economy, convenience, decency and general satisfaction with which their working people are able to live and go to and from their work. And two factors having a very important bearing on those questions are, first, the arrangement of main highways and street car lines in relation to the factories, to the network of steam railroad tracks, and to conveniently located and agreeable but cheap residence districts; and, second, the distribution of parks and other means of recreation, including occasional shore parks or recreation piers.

Sooner or later, as this district develops, it will almost surely prove desirable; for example, that the public acquire some of the islands opposite Wyandotte and make there a second and greater Belle Isle.

The highway problem is a complex one, and it is about as sure as anything human can be that if a comprehensive skeleton plan with grades is not skilfully worked out in advance, with due regard to the need for numerous railroad freight tracks, the community will have to shoulder a needlessly heavy burden in the future, both in delay of traffic and loss of life due to unnecessary grade crossings, and also in the cost of abolishing such grade crossings when they become intolerable.

#### D. The East Manufacturing Belt

East of the present Grand Trunk Railroad yards the river is followed by a collection of industrial plants the location of which was probably determined for the most part by the presence of the City Transit Railroad and the Belt Line. From hasty examination of this district it would seem as though no important interests would be seriously affected by the public control of this water front and the ultimate construction of a properly designed embankment adapted to permit such use of the river by the factories on the landward side, as is customary in connection with the public quays of so many important river towns in Europe. If this should prove to be feasible, it opens up the possibility of a continuous connection along the river from the center of the city to Belle Isle Bridge and the Boulevard, a possibility so desirable to keep open that it is worth the most careful scrutiny.

#### E. The Belle Isle Section

Near the bridge, and extending for some distance up-stream, the shore is utilized for a miscellaneous lot of summer amusements provided by private enterprise and looking on the whole rather shabby and down-at-the-heel. Such establishments serve a very good purpose, only they fail to serve it as well as could be desired, and the community would be better off if they were given a certain amount of intelligent supervision and encouragement to improve. There is plainly no reason why a public shore drive and promenade could not be worked out in connection with a lot of popular amusements of this sort, as has been so successfully done at some of the

great beach resorts of the Atlantic Coast, often under far more difficult circumstances.

Going further up the shore, there lies on both sides of the water-works a region which is apparently likely to develop into the most attractive residence district of the city. With its rapid transit facilities on Jefferson avenue, with the easy possibility of a broad rural parkway laid out along the now unoccupied river bank, with no steam railroads on that side of the city to bring in factories or a factory population, there seems to be every reason to suppose that a prosperous and remarkably beautiful residential suburb will develop in this direction; and the land owners could well afford to meet the city half way in establishing along the shore a liberal strip of park.

In view of the comparative ease with which such a parkway could be provided for between the Boulevard at the present Belle Isle Bridge and the Water Works Park, I wish to express my unqualified opposition to the construction at any time of a second bridge to connect the Water Works Park with the upper end of the Island. Aside from its cost and its needlessness, such a bridge would inevitably create a popular clamor for various conveniences and attractions at the easterly end of the Island, and sooner or later, item by item, would force the introduction of features which would in the long run entirely destroy the very essence of the quality that makes the east end of Belle Isle such a precious possession for a large city—namely, the sense of remoteness from things urban which one feels in passing into those peaceful and unembellished woods.

## II.

### Belle Isle Park

The principal immediate question in connection with Belle Isle Park is that of a better casino. The present building I understand to be somewhat inadequate in size and defective in its accommodations, and it is plainly not a very dignified or agreeable work of architecture. Its material and construction are such that after a comparatively short life of usefulness it has become decidedly shabby, and this shabbiness, taken with the rather poor service which I am told is accorded by the casino when it is running, make it much less useful and attractive than such a building ought to be. It appears to be generally accepted that a new casino, better built, more conveniently arranged, larger and of superior architectural design ought now to be erected, and the immediate question is as to the general character of such a permanent casino building and its best location.

I beg to point out, however, before taking up this question, that the real usefulness and attractiveness of such a building as a place of refreshment is far more dependent upon first-class housekeeping and catering than even upon the excellence of the building itself, and that no expenditure of money, or of ingenuity and good taste in the location and design of the new casino building, will bring satisfactory returns to the community unless steps are taken to secure the best possible management of the casino. The matters of the highest importance are its daily, weekly and annual maintenance in the best of repair and the highest state of cleanliness and neatness, and the provision of such kinds of food and service as will not merely suffice to meet the actual demands of the



general run of people who resort to the park, but keep always a step or two in advance of those demands—not in the way of elaborateness or costliness of fittings, of food or of service, but in keeping such simple variety of fare as may be offered up to the very best standard of its kind. The problem is not an easy one. It is a distinctly more difficult problem in catering and housekeeping than is offered to the steward of most clubs, or to the managers of most hotels, which are apt to cater to a much less varied class of patrons than those who ought to be able to resort with satisfaction to the casino in Belle Isle Park, and unless the difficulty and the absolute importance of securing just the right kind of management in the casino is fully recognized and adequate steps are taken to meet it, the expenditure of much money on a large and elaborate permanent building would seem essentially extravagant.

In considering the location of the new casino it is to be noted that the special beauty of Belle Isle Park consists chiefly of two landscape elements—the forest and the river. The beauty of the forest is best to be enjoyed by passing through the forest itself, not by looking from a building against the wall of foliage or palisade of trunks which it presents when viewed from any fixed point of view. The beauty of the river, on the other hand, with its endless, changing flotilla of shipping, presents an almost ideal scene for an outlook from a structure in which many people are assembled for rest and for refreshment. It seems to me, therefore, that there can be no doubt of the advisability of so placing the casino that it shall command the river to the best advantage—a condition which is utterly neglected in the location of the present building.

In the original plan for the development of Belle Isle, adopted by the Park Commission in 1883, this prin-

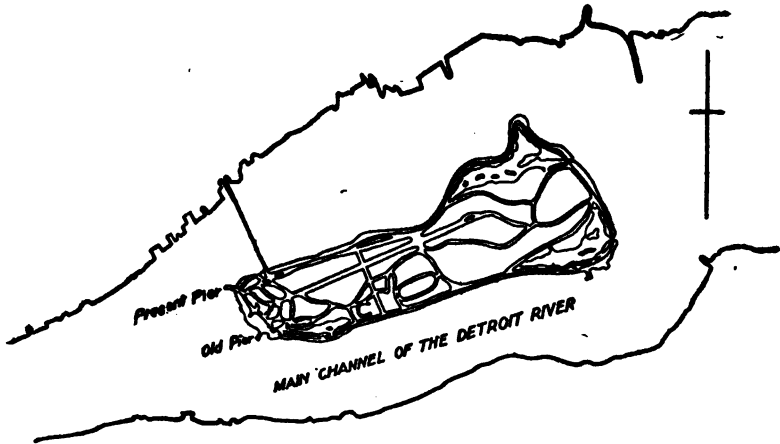
ciple was recognized in the allotment of a location along the shore to a great covered promenade and shelter connected with a casino building, with the expectation that such a great veranda for the people would become an immensely popular place to sit and rest and take refreshment, as well as a refuge for crowds of people in case of sudden rain storms. This long veranda-like structure was designed to connect with the pier, so as to serve in part as a waiting-place for the steamers and so as to afford, close at hand, without the long, hot, sunny walk which now confronts them, a comfortable place where women bringing their babies to the park might enjoy the breeze and the outlook both upon the river and upon the park, leaving them free at their leisure to stroll on as far from this safe base of operations as they might feel able to do.

The more I have considered the present condition of the park and the problem of the casino, the more I have been convinced that the fundamental purpose which this arrangement was designed to serve was a sound one, whatever might be said of the particular manner in which it was proposed to realize it.

In the general plan adopted by the Commission at that time, it was the intention to develop the main center of popular attraction close to the westerly end of the island near the pier in the region marked "A" upon the accompanying diagram; that is to say, in the most accessible part of the island; and the location for the casino and the accompanying stretch of verandas or covered promenade and shelter was along the shore at the westerly end of the island facing down the river.

It has happened, through force of circumstances, that the development of the park has taken a somewhat different turn and the main center of popular attraction is now in the region marked "C" upon the diagram—somewhat unfortunately removed from the steamboat landing. This

### DIAGRAM OF BELLE ISLE PARK



new center of interest is so firmly established by popular habit and by a considerable number of permanent improvements that it would seem unwise to attempt to revert to the original plan, and I am therefore inclined to recommend that the permanent casino building, with ample verandas and connecting sheltered promenade, should be placed near the meeting point of districts A and C upon the diagram, and that the landing pier for the steamers from the city be changed from the northwest corner of the island to the southwest corner, near the point where a former pier existed. Such a situation would have the advantage of proximity to the most popular picnic groves and it would admirably command the procession of ships passing up and down the main channel of the river. It is true that it would be a little further from the bridge than the present casino location, but the great majority of those who approach the park

by the bridge come in some kind of vehicle, and having traversed the distance from the Jefferson Avenue cars, can just as well go a few hundred yards further. The vast majority of those who must depend upon their feet alone to carry them about the park come by steamer, and it seems highly important that the casino with its associated resting places should be closely connected with the steamboat landing, as would be the case in the situation proposed.

The type of structure suitable for the proposed casino building is, of course, directly dependent upon the site selected. If my recommendation is followed in regard to this site, it occurs to me that a comparatively long and narrow building stretching along the shore would be the most reasonable type to adopt. Such a building would be much more open to the summer breeze drawing through it back and forth than would be a broader structure. It would give a pleasant outlook to a much larger proportion of people using it. Moreover, it would lend itself better than any other type of building to gradual extension for meeting increased demands and would lend itself readily to division into successive sections for catering to different classes of patrons. One section, for instance, might be of the lunch counter type another section offering cheap, light refreshment at small tables; another offering a more expensive and substantial meal. All of these successive sections would probably be united by a common veranda or covered terrace on the water-side, while the cooking, and as much as possible of the service business, would be provided for in the second story, so designed as to fit well into the roof, permitting the building as a whole to be kept relatively low, in harmony with the long level lines of the island.

Whatever material and whatever architectural style may be adopted for the building, it would seem that two

fundamental requirements of plan should be borne in mind—first, the building should be capable of indefinite extension without injuring its architectural quality, the service department extending along with the extension of the seating capacity; second, the building should be designed so far as possible in its permanent parts as a simple shell, consisting of outer walls, roof and floors, while the interior subdivisions should be of a simple and comparatively temporary sort, so as to make possible at small cost any re-arrangement of the interior which may be necessitated by the unforeseen developments of use. All of these conditions seem best fulfilled by a building of the type I have suggested, placed in connection with a new steamboat pier and riverside promenade along the southerly shore of the island near its western end.

The fact above mentioned that a center of popular attraction has been developed in a different locality from that originally proposed, and not conveniently related to the landing pier provided in the early days of the park, leads me to call attention to certain fundamental questions of park policy.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the *sine qua non* of the most successful park management is a consistent adherence to one controlling policy and general plan, year in and year out. In respect to economy and in respect to the value of the results, it is even more important that a given policy should be consistently adhered to year after year than that the policy should itself be the best that could have been devised. Vacillation between two or three different purposes—no matter how good those purposes may be—in conducting the improvements and the ordinary maintenance work of a park is far less profitable in the long run, both as to money cost and as to park results, than consistent adherence to a single policy, even though it be a less admirable one.

For example. In 1883 a considerable amount of money and much thoughtful consideration were expended in preparing a general plan for the future development of Belle Isle and a written definition of general policy for guiding the development of the park and such modifications of the general plans as the needs of the future might necessitate. When the Commission, after much deliberation and public discussion, had adopted such a policy and general plan, it began constructive work, and considerable sums of money were then expended in improvements the full value of which would only be attained when certain other improvements then contemplated should in the course of time be carried out. I am informed by the Secretary of the Department today that he has been unable to find in the files of the Department, or elsewhere, any copy of the plan or any copy of the written programme—the Constitution, so to speak—which the Commission set up in the beginning as a guide for the detailed legislative and executive work required from year to year. In the absence of any information of this sort as to the ultimate purposes which were in view in conducting certain of the earlier improvements of the park, later Commissioners have been unable to utilize the earlier improvements to their full value, and have been forced to ignore and to waste much of the result of earlier expenditures.

The fundamental importance of adherence to a consistent plan and policy in park work I cannot bring out any better than by quoting certain passages from the report of 1882, of which I find a single copy on file among the papers of my father, who was the Landscape Architect consulted by the Commission at that time:

“In several of the town parks of Europe, formed from one to three hundred years ago, no material modification of general design, or enlargement of scope, has,

from the beginning of them, been made. The population using them has increased several fold; it has changed its forms of government, its forms of society, in some cases its forms of religion; it has changed its forms of building; it has widened, and lengthened, and sewered, and paved, and lighted most of its streets; it has demolished its most solid constructions in walls and fortresses. In nothing else has so little change of general design occurred as in its parks; in nothing else so little been done, beyond the unnoticeable removal and repair of the results of decay, and wear and tear. While most other costly constructions have been losing in fitness and value for present use, the parks are recognized by all to have been, on the whole, gaining. In nothing else, then, that the people of one generation can leave behind them for others, is the economy of a steady pursuit of well-considered ends better established than it is by long experience in parks.

"\* \* \* The same principle of economy that leads to the keeping of parlor furniture and kitchen utensils in different divisions of a house, will lead to certain general, though less abrupt and definite, divisions in the planning of a park.

"\* \* \* A park is less fittingly compared to a dwelling than to a great public hall, attached to the main apartment of which there are several dependencies, vestibules, ante-room, cloak-room, refreshment-room, a counter for the sale of fans, lorgnettes, photographs, books of the music and so on.

"What is the great room that gives the whole this name of 'park'? What is the difference between the entertainment to which it should invite us and that of a concert-hall or an opera-house? It is a place in which to enjoy, instead of musical story-telling, dramatically or otherwise, the harmony and melody and poetry of actual

nature; and it is just as important in the one case as the other to avoid bringing fussy, disturbing business into the main hall.

"Every great park is valuable in proportion as it is the realization of an idyllic poem. As far as other objects are entertained upon the ground, economy requires that they shall be so pursued as to avoid disturbances, interruptions, and discords of the poetic theme."

And the full value of such an ideal park—refreshing tired city people far more than they realize at the time—almost like the unexciting refreshment of pure air itself—is not to be obtained except by a keen watchfulness for continuity of policy and consistency of aim in all the little things that shape from year to year the ever-changing landscape. Beautiful as Belle Isle is, it ought to be far more so after the twenty years of skillful care expended upon it, and would be so if that care had been more consistently applied to certain clearly defined and practically attainable poetic aims. It is to be hoped that greater consistency to such large purposes may guide the development of the park in the future.





### III.

#### Completion and Improvement of the Boulevard

Of the Boulevard I have been able to make only a most cursory examination at a time when all the details of improvement were buried in snow, and I can therefore report merely in regard to two matters.

The short break in the construction of the West Boulevard at the Michigan Central tracks seems most unfortunate. There is no way of crossing the tracks even at grade, and the only connection between the completed portions of the Boulevard which are thus severed is a circuitous one by way of narrow streets. The result is that the large investment made by the community in the completed parts of the West Boulevard, both in land and construction, does not begin to return its full value because of the lack of this one piece needed to make the connection. Without the data for estimating the cost of construction and planting, including the expense of carrying the railroad over the Boulevard, and without a better knowledge of the city's financial condition in respect to parks, I cannot venture a positive opinion that the immediate increase in value of the Boulevard as a result of completing this missing link would justify the immediate expenditure of putting it through, but I am strongly inclined to think it would. ,

I would point out, however, that the line of the unconstructed part of the Boulevard is a very awkward one, involving two of the bad right-angled turns, of which there are far too many in the Boulevard already, and involving also a long diagonal crossing under the railroad tracks at a point where the two sets of tracks have

already begun to diverge from each other. Such a crossing under the tracks would not only be costly to construct, but when completed would be relatively ugly and unpleasant, because of the length of the tunnel or subway and its unsymmetrical shape. If the present location were to be abandoned and a new location purchased or condemned from the end of the completed section south of the tracks in a direct line, at right angles to the railroad, to an intersection with the completed portion north of the tracks, not only would the cost of construction be materially diminished but the final result would be far better for the city, securing a good line for the Boulevard and a short, straight crossing under the tracks at a point where they are close together. The intervening property has no improvements of any considerable value upon it, and as the route is shorter it would take less land than is included in the location now held by the City, which later could then be disposed of or might be exchanged in part for land on the straighter route.

Some legal difficulties would undoubtedly arise in making such a change and some enabling legislation would perhaps be required, but the advantages are so obvious that they should not be foregone without a determined effort to face the difficulties and overcome them.

I have referred above to the bad corners and breaks in the alignment of the Boulevard at certain points. Everyone who has ever gone over the line must be familiar with them, and it should not take a fatal accident, like that which occurred last year on one of these corners, to emphasize the need of improvement. Some of the "jogs" can be very readily overcome with only minor changes in the lines of the roadway by the exercise of a certain amount of ingenuity in planning; but in certain cases no radical improvement can be made without some small additional land purchases, and it is highly important that

the land needed at such points should be determined and secured before buildings erected upon it shall permanently block the possibility of improvement.

In several cases the best way to handle these awkward problems would probably be in connection with the establishment of small local parks or squares, a considerable number of which ought to be distributed in an equitable and systematic manner in those parts of the city where provision has not yet been made for them.

It is interesting to note in this connection that Chicago by its recent purchases of small parks appears to have adopted the sound policy enunciated by the recent Special Park Commission of that City; viz., "Playgrounds and small parks should be so placed that no one could live more than one-half mile from some one of them." The accompanying diagram indicates the amount of areas in Detroit which are more than half a mile from the nearest park. Although I am tempted to discuss this subject further, it lies somewhat aside from the problems directly presented to me and to go into it thoroughly would lead so far afield that I must dismiss it with this brief reference.



## IV.

### Heart of the City

The questions which have arisen in connection with the neighborhood of Cadillac Square are of two kinds—questions of detail, such as those in regard to the location and character of monuments and decorations, the arrangement of car tracks, etc.; and questions of general plan affecting the property lines and the general disposition of the permanent building masses which are in the future to close in and give shape (or deformity) to the important public open spaces which here mark the business center of the city.

To worry over the first class of problems while there is any possibility of making changes in the general plan would be like starting to paint and decorate an old house at the very time of considering its reconstruction, and I shall therefore refer only to the larger questions of general plan.

The city is fortunate in having in the Campus Martius and Cadillac Square a considerable area of public open space at a point which is definitely and permanently fixed by the convergence upon it of a great series of thoroughfares as a municipal center of dominating importance. Whatever direction may be taken by different classes of urban development, there is not the least question that the region near the Campus Martius will remain peculiarly accessible from all parts of the city. It is therefore a peculiarly appropriate location for all the general municipal offices and other public and quasi-public buildings with which the whole community is concerned. Within this region and to the east of Woodward Avenue there is a large but curiously shapeless ramification of

public open spaces, partly in streets and partly in so-called "squares," together with one great permanent public edifice, the County Building. Intermixed with this public area are several irregular blocks of private land, relatively low in value—considering the proximity of the financial and retail centers—and occupied in large measure by very second-rate buildings.

The situation of the City Hall and the County Building in this region is eminently appropriate, but the utter shapelessness of the area or congeries of areas upon which these two buildings face makes the relation of each to the other and to its own immediate surroundings very far from satisfactory.

This condition has been so fully recognized that a number of projects have been urged for bringing the region into a more orderly condition by cutting off certain projecting pieces of private land and thus piecing out the public open space to more shapely outlines, which would relate in a dignified manner to the County Building. The most promising direction for further study appears to be that pointed out in the plan advanced by Mr. Scott and in the bolder plan of Mr. Scripps, both of which aim to secure a distinct new square in front of the County Building, linked with the Campus Martius by a part of the present Cadillac Square.

But while all of the projects which have been called to my attention concern themselves with the immediately apparent evils presented by the bad relation of the County Building to its surroundings, the problem as seen from the distant point of view of a stranger appears much larger than these plans recognize.

For example, the relation of the outline of the Campus Martius to the City Hall and to the streets and spaces which lead into it is also far from satisfactory. The old rectangle of the Campus Martius, although set

cater-cornered with Woodward Avenue and other important streets, had a certain shapeliness and must have had a corresponding dignity, which was all thrown to the winds when the City Hall was built within the limits of the Campus and at an awkward angle with its boundaries.

It is not enough therefore to consider the relation of these open areas to the County Building; their relation to the present City Hall or a future City Hall on the same or an adjacent site must also be considered; and taking a still larger view, it is the part of wisdom to consider their relation to the sites of other public and quasi-public buildings for which sites must be found somewhere in the future and for which this locality is peculiarly appropriate. To mention only two instances, the time cannot long be delayed when Detroit will build a new and worthier public library, and on or near the site of the Russell House private capital is likely soon to erect a modern fireproof hotel which should be worthy to take its place in a group of monumental public buildings—if only a proper place is provided for it instead of allowing it to jut awkwardly out in front of the City Hall, all askew with its surroundings.

If to the inevitable and unceasing increase of building space needed to accommodate the development of City, County and Federal business in a great manufacturing center, be added the requirements of museums, theaters, halls for concerts and conventions, and similar quasi-public purposes, a very little thoughtful consideration of the rate of increase in such buildings which accompanies the growth of a modern city in population and wealth will convince anyone who believes in the future of Detroit that even the next generation will erect enough buildings of this class to form a very imposing group, *provided that they BE grouped*—provided that shapely and convenient spaces be provided for them to face upon so as to bring them into agreeable architectural relationship.



The situation is this: In the region between the City Hall and the County Building lie a certain number of square feet of land distributed in ill-shapen squares and street intersections and occupied by improvements of a certain value, such as paving, parking, monuments and street car tracks; and also a certain number of square feet of building land distributed in more or less irregular lots and occupied by comparatively inexpensive and outworn structures. It is evident that apart from the value invested in these improvements a great deal better results could be secured for all concerned if all this land could only be pooled and then redivided into squares, streets and building land of better shape and better arranged.

The following alternatives seem to confront the city here:

First, the matter may be allowed to drift without change in the street lines, in which case private capital will from time to time replace the present buildings with others of a more costly and permanent sort, the city and various semi-public bodies will purchase lots from time to time at increasing prices and invest large sums of money in new buildings, but the whole region will remain a comparatively ineffective jumble, and the money which is sure to be spent in attempting to beautify both the buildings and the "Squares" will bring a relatively small return.

Second, the city may improve the outlines of the open area by making certain street extensions and widenings, as has been proposed, cutting through many lots, paying practically the full value of every building affected even though but a small piece be taken, and leaving the new frontage occupied in part by ill-shaped remnants of lots which will not afford inducements for the erection of desirable buildings in part by the newly exposed backs and sides of existing buildings, and in part, at the best,

by what is to be seen there today, and then the usual process of hap-hazard development will take place, and Detroit will have acquired at large expense shapely squares with a hodge-podge of buildings around them.

Third, the city might make a carefully digested plan for the best utilization of the whole region, and might then acquire under mortgage so much of the property abutting on the present squares as may be necessary in order to give it the power to effect on its own land the desirable changes in street and lot lines and in order to control the needful sites for future public buildings, and it might then take its time and make the actual changes in street lines just so fast as a reasonable regard for the value of present improvements will permit, in the meantime leasing such of the property as need not be vacated at once either to the present occupants or in the open market.

By readjusting the outline between the open space and certain parts of the adjacent building land (thus brought under one control), it should be possible to reach excellent results without a great increase in the total area devoted to streets and squares, whereas if the city does not itself acquire and hold any building land to meet its future needs, it can improve the shape of the open space only by the elimination of so much additional building land—an economic consideration of considerable weight in a region so near the heart of the city.

I would urge, therefore, that the Board of Commerce consider most carefully whether some means cannot be devised for thus controlling, in a large, far-sighted and conservative manner, the future improvement of Cadillac Square and the adjacent building land, so as to get out of it the largest possible returns both direct and indirect.

But even if the Cadillac Square problem be approached in this broad and far-sighted manner, it should

not be considered independently of other parts of the downtown district. Woodward Avenue, as the backbone of the city, connects in close relation with the Campus Martius two other focal points of great importance—Grand Circus Park and the center of the River Front at the foot of Woodward Avenue.

About the part which Grand Circus Park is to play in the development of the heart of the City, and the relative importance of the plainly desirable extensions and developments of the series of radial streets which impinge upon it, I cannot venture an opinion upon such a superficial knowledge as I possess, but plainly it involves questions that ought to be taken up at the same time with those of the Campus Martius and Cadillac Square. With them, too, is involved the rather dubious possibility of bringing the Federal Building into relation with either or both of these centers at a reasonable expense, and here also ought to be considered the possibility which is now opened up—since a railroad tunnel can burrow as cheaply under one part of the city as another—of placing the proposed Union Station somewhere in this general locality near the focus of all the street railways instead of removing it to a distance.

It is hard to realize, under the conditions of today, what part may be filled in the city of the future by the foot of Woodward Avenue. As the culminating point in the line where the traffic of the City meets the commerce of the Lakes, as the terminus of that broad avenue upon which all the city's ways converge, and as the middle of the City's Front, this spot is plainly marked as the site for some great tribune, from which enthroned Detroit shall review the vast procession of the ships in the centuries to come. Not even the towering mass of Gibraltar itself has stood guard over such pageant as must here salute its mistress, and the day will surely come—be it

soon or late, be it approached with wise foresight or by devious and wasteful courses—when Detroit will here erect a great and monumental structure dominating all the aggregated buildings of the city and typifying to the traveler from afar the City's own dominion. Rising from the base which will be formed by an orderly and dignified treatment of the River Front and spanning the axis of Woodward Avenue, such a structure will be not merely what a Water Gate was to the mediaeval city, it will be also what the proposed peristyle and its colossal column were designed to be for Detroit, and in a site far more appropriate for the culminating architectural accent of the City; and further, if my forecast is not mistaken, when the time comes for designing this great structure it will be not merely something which shall inspire the beholder but something which the people shall use.

There is no haste about the realization of this dream. Detroit has all the ages before it, with time and means to accomplish things far beyond our poor conception. I speak of it only to point out that in the treatment of the Campus Martius, of Cadillac Square, of the Grand Circus with its radiating streets and of other problems in this locality it should be borne in mind that time will surely bring forth at the Water Gate some soaring structure that will demand a recognition of unity throughout the heart of the City.

It is for the citizens of Detroit today to see to it that mere lack of deliberate, broad foresight and patient inventive study today shall not compel your successors to throw away and reconstruct the results of your efforts as you must do to some extent to the work of your predecessors if you are to make a success of Cadillac Square.



## Report of Charles Mulford Robinson

**GENTLEMEN:**—In accordance with your request, I have examined the City of Detroit with a view to pointing out in a general preliminary report such civic improvements as seem to me desirable. In the selection of these I have tried to restrict myself to those that are really practicable, as otherwise the report would have no more than an academic interest and value. The duty of today is not to dream of an impossible Carthage on the shore of the Detroit River; but taking the city as it is, and with due regard to the rapid increase in its population and wealth and the rise of its civic ideals, to suggest the possible changes that are best worth while, that will count for most and are most essential to make it seize the chance which is at its hand and to realize its opportunity for civic beauty, convenience and stateliness.

This will cost something. There is nothing good that doesn't cost. But if you have faith in Detroit, even the faith in it that is had by the outside world, you will not be afraid of some expense. In nothing that we do, are we building so surely for the future as in the development of our cities. If, now, in any proposed change that is within the bounds of financial reason an immediate and certain advantage is added to the future good, that change should thereby become practicable. The faint-hearted will be reassured and you will have ready an answer for the selfish who derisively ask what posterity ever has done for them—forgetful of their own inheri-

tance from the past. So your committee understands, I am sure, that "practicable" means more than so simple as to be done today and tomorrow or so cheap as to be paid for out of current expenses. It means that a faith and courage, justified by past and present, is the wise basis of the planning.

In looking over a city to determine what may be done to make it grasp its civic opportunities, I think we have to remember that not remodeling, but *development*, is to be desired. Cities have as marked an individuality as people, and whatever charm and separate attractiveness they have lies in those peculiarities which stamp them with personality—which, for example, cause Detroit to be Detroit, and not Buffalo or Milwaukee. To perceive these and to develop them as Athens developed (too narrowly) the Acropolis, or Rome the Forum, is to insure the city's interest and distinctive charm, for they are the things that make cities remembered.

### The Street Plan

Now there are two features of Detroit that are peculiar to it and especially distinctive. These are the river, with its vast even flow of pure water, and the street arrangement that has resulted from the Governor and Judges' plan. In making any change in street topography, I think it very essential that respect and consideration should be shown for that plotting which not only is an essential and interesting characteristic of the city, but which is the very frame and skeleton on which local history is hung. In making street changes, you should cherish the spirit of the old plan, developing it and fitting it to new conditions, but not slashing it right and left as regardless as if you had only the colorless checkerboard of the usual city map on which to work.

Nearly all the most serious mistakes of Detroit's past have arisen from a disregard of the spirit of the Governor and Judges' plan. If the plotters of the farms had had respect for that, instead of each going his own way, the streets beyond Cass and Brush would not have had the jogs they now have, and Detroit would have had a better chance for beauty and harmony, to say nothing of the added convenience and economy for its citizens in getting about. The same thing has been true as regards the plotters of the suburban tracts just beyond the steadily advancing city line; and it was neglect of the spirit of that plan that placed the County Building where it now stands, as it was indifference to the fine topographical provision of civic centers that put the Federal Building almost out of sight. Even the City Hall would not have stood just where it does, had the plan been fully respected.

But to think of correcting all these errors and to devise a new and splendid modern city on a careful and accurate development of the original plotting is not the problem of the hour, because it would not be practicable. We may note, for instance, taking them one by one, that Grand River Avenue ought to be matched by another splendid diagonal between Gratiot and Woodward, which would cut an extension of Grand River at right angles, offering direct communication to the residents of the northeastern section of the city. If this could be made a parkway, as Philadelphia is now building a splendid diagonal parkway, and could be connected with the boulevard, so much the better. But unless the ill-fortune of a fire, such as recently devastated large areas in other cities, should chance to lay bare that portion of Detroit, it will not be practicable to cut the avenue through, because with the other needs the demand for this will not justify the expense. We may only keep the thought of



it in mind, to be ready should opportunity offer. Similarly one can wish that Griswold Street might be sometime extended at its full width to the river.

Again, there are innumerable jogs in the streets that run east and west, and much perfectly justifiable complaint concerning them; but it is out of the question to remedy all of these now. I observed that in a great many cases, however, it is feasible to work an immediate improvement by the substitution of a curve for the present double right-angle. In these cases it is simply a matter of curbing and plotting, involving the purchase of no additional property. In yet other cases, the acquirement of no more than ten or fifteen feet from the corners of unoccupied lots will render possible a change by which a curve, making a really delightful street variation, could be substituted for the present awkward, annoying, dangerous and retarding "jog." As fast as opportunity offers, these changes ought, of course, to be brought about; and little by little there would thus be wrought a very great and very practical improvement in the city plan. I would recommend the appointment of a sub-committee to act in this matter. It should represent the Board and should make it a duty to watch for these chances and to see that they are availed of by the city to rectify present conditions. Unless some committee representing the whole city is thus on the watch, they are too likely to be overlooked or to have only the weak advocacy of the local neighborhood. The work is important to the city at large, and by the suggested committee much good can be done.

Coming to the matter of the irregular plotting of suburban areas, it is remarkable that with so many examples of the evil consequences which result from lack of a comprehensive scheme, there is still permitted a continuance of inharmonious plotting. An immediate and

obvious remedy would be the extension of the city line. It may properly be argued that when the urban population has reached so near a certain tract as to make worth while its division and sub-division into streets, the time has come for the city to exert over the tract that supervision which it is supposed to exercise over all the land within its boundaries. It is not as if the new areas were to be always a frontier, their sins to be forgiven as those of a frontier. With the wonderful increase in rapid transit facilities, the onward march of the city is no less certain than is its gain in population, and streets that are on today's frontier may tomorrow be arteries of heavy travel. In thus extending the city line also, in filing a "city map," and in demanding adherence to its lines in the new plotting, Detroit would be only following the precedent of other cities.

### The Location of Public Buildings

As for the location of the public buildings, it has been resolved to postpone, for some years at least, the erection of a new City Hall, while the location of the Federal and County Buildings is to be now accepted as fixed. Not to deplore the loss of an exceptional opportunity, but to make the best of the situation, is the present duty.

Consideration of these buildings necessarily involves consideration of the Campus Martius and of Cadillac Square, which are in the very heart of the city, and of which the former was a striking feature of the Governor and Judges' plan. As the city has developed, and great buildings have clustered around the Campus instead of around the Grand Circus, this has become in fact the most conspicuous feature of the plan—as unique in the possibilities of its civic function as in the name that has clung

to it. Properly to develop this, to make it for Detroit what the Place de la Concorde is to Paris, to throw the emphasis of civic improvement effort upon this space—to which center each of the four greatest streets of the city—and so to bring out and ennoble the most prominently persistent feature of the Governor and Judges' plan—this will do more for Detroit than any other one thing, save the reclaiming of some of the river bank, and it will be to the enhancement—not the loss—of the individuality of the city.

Unhappily the problem has lately become extremely difficult. The first and most obvious necessity is the removal of the buildings—fortunately still cheap two and three-story structures—that are on the north side of Cadillac Square, and that screen half of the County Building from the City Hall and Campus. The action, which should of course be taken immediately, seems to be absolutely essential, and it will be folly for Detroit to pretend to any regard for the principles of civic aesthetics while this blot remains. It would seem, however, that the county might well bear half of the expense, since the purpose is to reveal the County Building, and so to give a return on the large investment which it has made in the structure's dignity and beauty.

The buildings run back a hundred feet to a twenty foot alley, and with this addition to its area a remodeling of Cadillac Square will become necessary. It will be then a splendid plaza three hundred and twenty feet wide, and will invite a rearrangement of the civic sculpture—monuments and fountains—now scattered somewhat promiscuously about Campus and Square.

I have given a good deal of thought to the problem, as it will be thus presented, and my personal feeling is that it may be advisable to purchase one other, comparatively small, piece of real estate, regarding which there

seems at this time to be no hurry; that it will then be possible to rearrange the car tracks in the Campus Martius, without detriment to traffic, and to erect an Isle of Safety, that will serve also as a waiting place for passengers who desire to board the trolleys, and that will be ornamentally lighted, making it a handsome, appropriate and useful feature of the new development. Some Isles of Safety are already very much needed on the Campus; but in view of the necessity of remodeling the whole space—now an insignificant jumble of trolley cars and stray statuary—plans for these may well be held in abeyance. The possibilities of the space are so fine, and its noble development will add so much to the appearance of Detroit, that I urge you with all the force I have to summon to the solution of this complex problem a commission that shall include an architect, a landscape architect, and a city designer. You should not trust it to one man. His success or failure at this point means too much to you; and it is deserving, both in its difficulty and in its reward for success, of the combined judgment and knowledge of several experts. All that I can attempt to do in this report is to bid you see that the structures on the north side of Cadillac Square now screening the County Building be purchased, and then, putting my finger on the Campus Martius, to say, develop that to its utmost, and for this purpose call to your aid a commission of experts.

The Federal Building is so isolated by its site that the problem is to bring it into relation with the other public structures, for the day has gone by when it is necessary to present to such a committee as yours any arguments for the apparent grouping of the public buildings. You fully appreciate that in the creation of a Civic Center (already nearly realized), through the bringing of these buildings into a single comprehensive scheme, De-

troit would take its place among the beautiful cities of the world. And the distance between the Federal Building and the County Building, much of which is already a public open space, is no more than that between the most distant structures which the city of Cleveland is now bringing into a splended Court of Honor.

To connect the Federal Building with the central scheme, the row of buildings—still, happily, unimportant—on the north side of Fort street, between it and the City Hall, ought to be removed. This space should not, then, be thrown into the street to become part of a broad Plaza, as will be done at Cadillac Square, but it should be given a distinct development that will frankly indicate its exact purpose, and it should even be shut off from the street by a line of ornamental columns that will carry on the building line.

These changes mean altogether a considerable expenditure and the acquirement of a good deal of property; but once the land is purchased its development, which can wait if you desire, will not be expensive. The sale of the material may fully care for that. And I know of no other city in the country where the purchase of so little and, so inexpensively built up, would give so large a public tract before and around the public buildings, and would offer so splendid an opportunity in the very center of the town. This work is practicable today, but it may not be in six months or a year from now. Any day a skyscraper may begin to rise on one of these plots, and then Detroit's opportunity will be forever lost. You have a chance—a rare, great chance—and I beg that you will grasp it, in appreciation of what your decision will mean to the future of the city.

I have presented the opportunity in its simplest form because I want you to see how clear the present duty is. If the work were to be done in almost any city of Europe,

the municipality would purchase much more land than that directly required for the improvement: first, that it might have appropriate sites for other public buildings; second, that it might control the private buildings which would face on the new plaza; and third, that it might recoup itself for some of the original expenditure by the sale of building lots at the advanced value which should result from the development. It is hardly necessary to go into the matter in detail. You are the best judges whether such a plan would be at all feasible in Detroit, whether there would be the requisite public confidence in the integrity and business acumen of the administration; whether it could be better managed by an officially appointed commission of representative citizens; or whether it will be best to follow the commoner American method of adopting the direct and simplest course and buying for the municipality only what the municipality will immediately use. My plea now is simply that the work be undertaken—the work that would give to your Board a place in local history beside “the Governor and Judges.”

So much for the correction of the most prominent of the mistakes that have arisen from disregard of the spirit of Detroit's historic plan. There remain some considerations concerning its adaptation to modern conditions.

### Interior Boulevards

Washington Avenue, a street of the splendid width of two hundred feet and parked down the center, stops abruptly within a block of Lafayette Avenue, which you have now added to the boulevard system. By extending it the one block and giving it a slight curve, that would not be inappropriate in a parked street of such width, you can connect it with the boulevard, you can offer it the fine terminus of the Federal Building and tower, and you can

open the Federal Building on that side. It would seem that the advantages were sufficiently numerous and important to make this worth while. It may be said, of course, that the fine and beautiful thing to do would be to extend Washington Avenue at its full width to the river, where it would come out just at the depots; but, with the other more pressing expenditures, I have feared that this would not seem practicable.

With the great length of Grand River Avenue and the rapid increase of population, the matter of an adequate outlet for its growing traffic has become pressing. The question is one of municipal convenience more than of civic aesthetics. At the point where Grand River narrows from 100 to 60 feet, Cass Avenue loses also 24 feet of its width, and the point is where the heavy travel of these long and busy streets converges. With the city's growth congestion here must become steadily more serious unless relief is offered, and the cost of relief must constantly increase. I think the best plan now is to widen Grand River Avenue on its south side to its intersection with Washington Avenue. This is broad enough to facilitate the distribution of the traffic. An ampler plan, but one involving more expense, would be to widen Grand River as suggested and continue it to Capitol Park; but I believe that the advantage over the Washington Avenue terminus, with its proffer of two thoroughfares to Woodward Avenue, would not be great enough to commend the added cost.

On the other side of Grand Circus Park there is an opportunity for a noble bit of municipal planning by the extension, at its full width, of Madison Avenue east to Raynor Street, intersecting Gratiot Avenue, and opening Clinton Park. This improvement would be most conspicuously aesthetic.

Other street changes could be suggested, for I think the great lesson which Detroit has to learn, as regards topography, is that it is the duty of a street to lead to something; that its function is not alone to collect and carry traffic; it is quite as much to disperse it. But I have pointed out as many changes as are likely to prove "practicable" in this portion of the city; and, while retaining its original distinctive character, they are the changes that will do most to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of its highways and to add to the beauty and convenience of the business section. If you do these things and nothing more, you will have done much to give to Detroit that air of spaciousness and scientific planning which is the charm of the beautiful modern city.

But there is one more need to which, fortunately, the people of Detroit are awakened, that is essential to their own fuller enjoyment, to the good impression that the city should make upon strangers, and to an appearance of public spirit and wise planning. This is the reclaiming and betterment of a part of the water front. The thing of which you all are proudest is your noble river, and it is the thing which the city seems to treat most contemptuously.

### The Water Front

If a map of the city were held at a little distance and a stranger were asked to indicate the portion of the water front which he thought should be reclaimed, he would point to that part nearest to the center of the city and toward which the great streets converge. If now the map were brought a little nearer, and he was shown that the railroads and large manufactories occupied the river front from Brush Street almost to Belle Isle bridge, and from Third Street as far in the opposite direction, he



would reiterate his former judgment and would congratulate you on the good luck which exempts from the railroad's steel grip the very portion most to be desired. Suppose now the map were brought so near that he could study it, and he should see a splendid avenue, 120 feet wide, and the backbone of the city, brought in a straight line to the river at about the center of the plot he had indicated; suppose he were told that a little portion of the land on one side of the avenue and within the chosen strip were already public property, where a tiny bit of green sward accessible by an alley was pathetically called a "park," and that on the other side, but still within the narrow strip, there was another bit of green sward which private enterprise had secured, would not his judgment be emphatically confirmed? It is really a remarkable combination of circumstances that have conspired to make available for public water front improvement the little space between Third and Brush Streets. Whatever may be thought of the advisability or possibility of continuing the work up or down the river, there can be no two opinions as to where you should begin. To secure this all parties should concentrate.

For my own part, I shall not recommend a thought of extending the work in a continuous form, for some years at least, beyond the limits indicated. The dirt and noise of railroads and factories would make unpleasant the land side of the suggested promenade, even if it were practicable; and if once you get the ten blocks or so of river bank in the center of the city and make all you might of that, you will find it accommodating a multitude of people, while there will be many other ways, of which much has been already pointed out, in which the public moneys can be more effectively expended. But if not recommending further continuous construction at just this time, I do not wish to be understood as advising neg-

lect of the water front beyond the chosen strip. I shall indicate in the termini of the boulevard some specific points at which special improvement can be made, and I would urge the utmost vigilance to grasp any opportunity that may arise for a pleasant public space on the shore. It would be well to have a society making this its particular care. And I would urge that as far as possible every street which comes down to the water's edge should be suitably finished as a municipal vantage point, whence any one may watch, with safety and enjoyment, the wonderful panorama of the river traffic. If you improve the street ends and the ten blocks in the center of the city, you will have restored the river to the people, and then the city will not seem to have turned its back to the stream, but to be facing it.

A word now about the character of the improvement between Brush and Third Streets. It ought to be substantial in appearance and to be given its main and strong emphasis at Woodward Avenue. There has been some talk about the Antwerp promenade offering a good model for Detroit, and in certain particulars its hints are of value; but the Antwerp promenade is distinctly disappointing in its lightness of construction. Any seeming flimsiness on the shore line is out-of-place, for its apparent purpose is to arrest the mighty tide. If you make it orderly, strong, imposing, as Paris, London, Rome and smaller Italian cities do, you at once dignify the aspect of the city, and magnify the power of the stream. Moreover, in Detroit very large and strong steamers will tie up before this water front improvement. If they were to be the small pleasure craft of an ordinary river, there would be less incongruousness in setting them beside a lightly built esplanade; but you do not want it to look as if with a single sigh from their great stacks and a single restless turn of their propellers they would pull

the whole construction into the river! Whatever you do, make the improvement look worthy of the meeting place of a great city and a great river and make it seem strong enough to hold the largest vessels that may tie there. For these reasons I do not favor the "Board Walk" idea, nor even the likeness of the Atlantic City walk which is a board floor on a light steel frame. By all means have the light steel frame, but give it a concrete floor and give to it—at least in the seeming—piers of masonry or of concrete made to look like stone. And have no gas pipe railing along its edge; but an ornamental and substantial one—unless you will build a parapet—and punctuate it at near intervals with stout light standards alternating with masts for flags.

Begin the work at Woodward Avenue, treating that as a water-gate—the official entrance to the city. And it should be that, the place where distinguished guests are received. There never was a spot more clearly and splendidly marked for the purpose than this broad avenue leading straight up to the public buildings. The terminus of the street already belongs to the city, so that you can do what you like with it. There is a good illustration in Bordeaux's harbor treatment; but I would like to see it modified a little for your case. I would suggest twin towers, connected very high up (so as not to break the fine vista of the street) by a graceful span of steel, making a lofty promenade. Beads of light, outlining the arch on the landward side, would take the place of the string that now flutters across the avenue, in very weak recognition of the civic import of the spot. On the river side the arch itself would be lost in darkness at night, but lights would blaze from the summit of the towers. Supplementary to the towers, and carrying the scheme into the city, I think there would be wanted standards at the top of the gentle ascent, where Jefferson Avenue crosses

Woodward. On the other sides of the towers, away from the street, where the ferry piers for Windsor and Belle Isle are now, architectural bays would support a broad esplanade without necessary detriment, and even with advantage, to the present business. From these points the promenade, steel frame on seeming piers of stone and grown somewhat narrower (unless you found it feasible to adopt the plan of Algiers in which warehouse and promenade are combined) could stretch away, coming down to the level of the ground by a broad flight of steps where the municipal lighting plant and the reserved space at the Wayne Hotel give opportunities for little parks. The whole cost of this improvement would be small indeed considering the pleasure it would give to the people and the betterment of the aspect of the city; and it is a well conceived idea that at the lighting plant a public bath and wash house, making use of the exhaust steam, could be inconspicuously added to the scheme.

The most distinctive features of Detroit, the river front and Campus Martius, have been now considered—the features upon which the special emphasis is to be put in developing its civic possibilities. There remain a group of undertakings that concern the convenience, comfort and pleasure of the residents of the city more particularly than its guests—that may count much with the citizens, but not greatly with the general impression which Detroit would make upon strangers. These include the problems connected with the parks and boulevards and the general care of the city.

#### A New Belle Isle Bridge

Beginning with Belle Isle, a unique and splendid pleasure ground, the horrible bridge that connects it with the mainland is too much of a calamity to make possible

a restriction of its effect to the citizens alone. Nobly dedicating the great reserve to public enjoyment, you have made its approach the semblance of a railroad bridge of the ugliest type. A new bridge here cannot be long delayed, and when it comes it should be made monumental and beautiful, of full boulevard width, and in appearance as well as in fact a part of the boulevard. On the island itself, the sheds at the lower end should give way—as doubtless they soon will—to something worthier. Detroit has outgrown that first phase of civic art when fine things are done in a shamefaced, makeshift way, and there is no need now of a professional advice to correct the error.

Having toured the island on a November morning, I shall make no attempt to discuss its interior development beyond remarking that here, as also in Water Works Park, the canal borders should have better planting. In a natural park especially, these canals, an excellent feature, ought to have the semblance of placid streams with the hard lines of their edges broken by vegetation. The willows give a beautiful start in securing this effect.

At the upper end of the island, but with great circumspection in the accompanying planning lest the wild beauty of the natural forest be broken, I would have a bridge—distinctly secondary in importance to the main approach—thrown over to the Water Works Park. This will create a circular drive—always a desirable feature in park development, since it makes possible a return by another route than that which was used in coming—and will bring Water Works Park into the park system. Further to do this, to complete the circle and incidentally recognizing the city's growth, I would recommend that Cadillac Avenue be included in the boulevard system as far as Kercheval Avenue. It leads with absolute direct-

ness from Water Works Park, is the broadest of the north and south streets near it, and the Water Works Tower closes its vista very picturesquely as one approaches the park. Reaching Kercheval Avenue and turning towards the city, I would include that in the boulevard system until the woods on the right hand side are reached. They comprise a fine growth of large timber, covering a parallelogram strangely matching in size and situation Clark Park on the other side of the city. I think a very strong effort should be made, while these trees are still standing, to add the tract to the park system. If this can be done, the new boulevard can then lose itself with pleasant variation in a park drive through the woods, emerging at their further end to connect directly with the present boulevard. I hope this will certainly be brought about; but should efforts to obtain the woodland fail, the route could continue along Kercheval Avenue to the boulevard. The alternative is distinctly less desirable, but there is no other better route, and while there are already car tracks on Kercheval Avenue, the distance is not great. The track can be put at the side of the road, more or less planted out, and turf between the rails will lessen dust and noise as has been successfully done on Beacon Boulevard, for instance, in Boston. The completion of this new boulevard circle would prove, I believe, a very desirable and popular addition to your system.

### The Boulevard

Taking up now the existing boulevard, with a word of praise for the courage and foresight that dared to establish and develop it, we may begin at the Belle Isle bridge.

There seems to be a chance, on both sides here, for the city to obtain water frontage; and it ought to do so,

if for no other reason than to hold off at arm's length such industrial plants as the neighboring Detroit Stove Works, which, whatever are their merits, are not appropriate boulevard ornaments. At the crossing of Gratiot Avenue the boulevard takes a jog which is unnecessarily bad. By a very little care in replanning it can be given a graceful curve. Again, the subsequent turn, as in the case of its almost every turn, is sharper than desirable. At McDougall Avenue I think the boulevard should take a double turn, going not only to the right but also to the left, boulevarding McDougall the short two blocks to Ferry, whence a pleasant drive would be offered into the very center of the residence district. Continuing on the established boulevard, there are reached, after the third turn, the railroad crossings. I note that the boulevard is being carried, very properly, over one of the sets of tracks and I hope the plan is, as it should be, to continue it on a viaduct until both series of tracks are passed. This would add very little to the expense, would be much pleasanter than, having risen over one set of tracks, to fall abruptly to the level and then to rise over the next, and it would tend to conceal from this park road the manufacturing plants that are gathered here. I think, too, that by virtue of the latter's position at the side of the boulevard, ampelopsis might be planted against their walls.

Of the rest of the boulevard it is hardly necessary to speak with the same detail, the problem being generally similar throughout, but in making the circuit it occurred to me that there were long stretches where a bridle path might so pleasantly be included that I wondered it had not been demanded. A bridle path, it may be added, is almost as unfailing a source of enjoyment to those who watch the riding as to those who ride. At the western end of the boulevard, the lack of a terminus is notable

and striking. Having come twelve miles around this noble drive, with the river in sight again, it fritters into nothing. It should be carried over the tracks and brought to the water's edge, and here, at the elevation gained in crossing the railroad, a turn should be made whence the panorama of the river may be seen. There is a good chance here for a necessary bit of water front improvement.

In the boulevarding of Lafayette Avenue, an opportunity is offered to bring Clark Park into the system, instead of permitting its continued isolation as if a giant dray bringing some of the country into town had dropped this off the back. Lafayette Boulevard should not stop abruptly at the playground; but even at the risk of losing some playground space—or at the cost of its redistribution—the road should be brought gracefully around to lose itself in the devious ways of the park.

So, with a report already much longer than I had intended, we come to some general considerations, affecting the city as a whole.

You have fine trees, but they ought to be taken care of, and I would earnestly recommend that the street trees be put in charge of the Commissioner of Parks and Boulevards, or that the office of city forester be created. Better results are obtained, as a rule, in having a separate officer who has made a special study of street trees, who is an expert in their care, and who alone is responsible for them, than in putting them in charge of a Park Board.

You have also an exceptionally good system of alleys, speaking topographically; but they are badly treated. The alleys ought to be paved, preferably with asphalt, throughout the business section, because it is easiest to keep clean. Cobblestones are properly considered now a relic of urban barbarism—in Baltimore the laying of them is treated legally as a crime. And whether the al-



leys are paved or not, an ordinance should require that all rubbish and ashes be put into receptacles which will be emptied by the city as certainly as the garbage is so collected. You cannot have clean streets while you have dirty alleys; and ill-paved alleys mock well-paved streets.

The trolleys are necessarily a very important feature of modern city life. They seem to be exceptionally so in Detroit, and local conditions having fastened upon you the overhead system for an indefinite future, you should see that it serves as far as possible the ends of civic beauty. In the business district at least—certainly on Woodward Avenue between the Water Gate and the Grand Circus Park and on the re-made Campus Martius and Cadillac Square—you may properly demand some art and beauty in the trolley poles. These are conspicuous street fixtures which in Europe are made frankly ornamental; and I am glad to say that the movement has now reached America. Photographs of castings for a really ornamental base and cap to a trolley pole have lately been sent to me by the Phoenix Iron Works Corporation, of Hartford, Conn., and it is surprising how cheaply these can be added to the poles and with what good effect. The matter is well worth your looking into. It is a chance to make a distinct improvement in the appearance of your streets without expense to the city.

### Small Parks

One other general matter to which I would call your attention is Detroit's paucity of small parks, when the topography of the city lends itself singularly well to their development at street intersections. Here they will become part of the street system and can occupy ground which, owing to the narrowness of the lot or its tapering character, is good for so little else that it must be always

an eyesore until it is thus developed. The plan of Detroit, with very good reason, suggests that of Washington, and you all know how important a feature of that city's beauty is the number of its ornamental circles, triangles and squares. Of course, you cannot put these all over the town at once, but I would suggest that Detroit adopt the general plan of New York City—so much less happily placed in this respect—where a certain sum is set aside for expenditure each year in securing open spaces. In Philadelphia a strong association of private citizens—the City Parks Association—has interested itself in the matter. The streets are laid out on the grid-iron plan so that there any park reservation usually means loss of good building land, as it would not mean here. Yet the 1904 report shows that in the sixteen years of the Association's life, twenty new open spaces have been actually secured and improved, that five more are now being improved, and that nineteen others have been already plotted or given, but have not yet been developed. This is a total of forty-four new open spaces, against a total of twelve secured in all the long previous life of the city. And a surprising and encouraging feature of the movement is the number of spaces that have been presented to the city. In the suburban plotting, outside the present Detroit city limits, there should be no need of such an opportunist policy, but the parks should be arranged for in the street planning.

### Conclusion

As I look back over the recommendations of this report, it seems as if I had given too many suggestions, as if I had so scattered the emphasis as to dissipate it and leave no clear conception of precisely what to do. But it was your wish that I should cover the whole city, and

in a place the size of Detroit you cannot concentrate upon any one thing with a hope of making the city beautiful. You must seize this opportunity and that opportunity; there must be a change here and a development there; there must be a dwelling upon specific details in one part of the city and in another. But when all is done, the City Beautiful will emerge—the city made convenient, stately, dignified, obviously conscious of its opportunities, sure of its future, its every advantage grasped.

And after all, the recommendations once grouped, are not so many as to confuse nor is their total impracticable. There is the suggestion of a sub-committee to handle the matter of the street jogs; there are certain definite pieces of real estate to be acquired; there is to be an extension of the city boundaries or the adoption of a metropolitan map; there is to be advocated the appointment of a commission of experts to deal with the Campus Martius and Cadillac Square problem; there is to be the water front improvement; there are the park and boulevard recommendations, to be considered by the Commissioner of Parks and Boulevards; there is the suggestion that a City Forester be asked for, that the alleys have better care, that an improved trolley pole be obtained in the show parts of the city, and that there be begun an effort to secure more small parks at street intersections. Detroit is fortunate among American municipalities in having already secured a good and abundant water supply, good sewage and good light. It may now reasonably turn to the amenities of life, and with the courage, faith, public spirit and broad view that has made the city what it already is, it may take up the task of making itself more beautiful and the life in it pleasanter, and of grasping the heritages that are rightfully its people's.

In closing the report I have only one more word to say. It is to express my appreciation of the courtesies

of the Committee and of the ready co-operation of every member. You made a task that must in any case have been exceptionally interesting—so great are Detroit's opportunities—one also of exceeding personal pleasure.







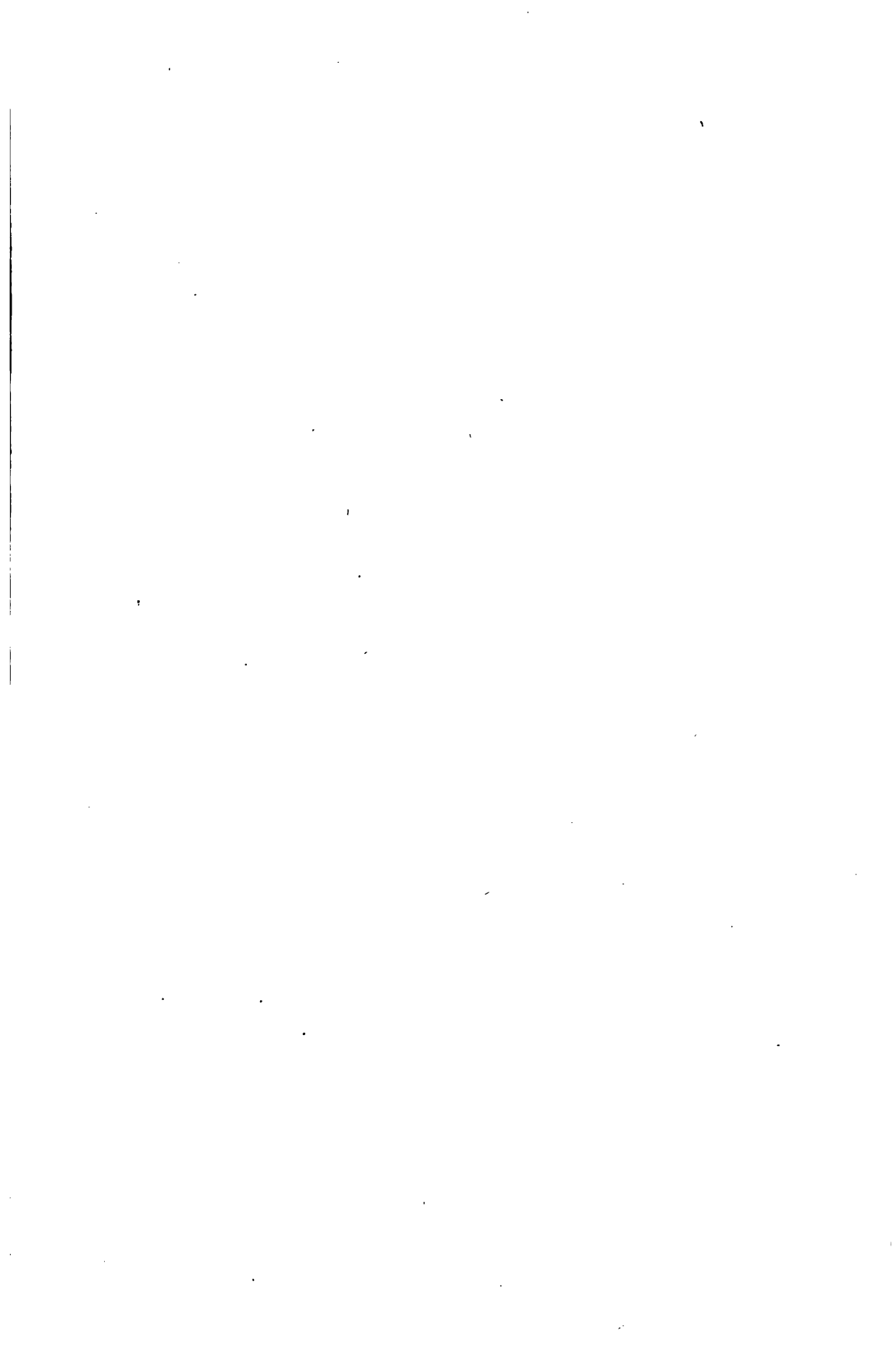












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